

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
October 19, 2006

Members Present: Tom McAuley (Vice Chair) , Elsie Fetterman, Susan Whitbourne, Doris Holden, Ed Kaler, Tom McAuley, Rosemary Kofler, David Yaukey, Daniel Clapp

Absent: Barbara Sutherland

Select Board Liaison: absent

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services) Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Marlene Barnett (Program Coordinator), Jeanette Miller

Guests: Dr. Charles Schewe, Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), Dorothy Ives, Jean Laino, Marge Babb

Welcome:

Tom McAuley, Vice Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:10 AM.

Minutes of September Meeting:

The minutes of the September 14, 2006 meeting were approved and accepted.

Senior Trust Treasurer's Report:

Doris distributed copies of the report. The balance is \$581.45. The report was approved and accepted.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

Comprehensive Planning Committee Representation:

Nancy reported that Jean Haggerty can no longer represent the COA at the Comprehensive Planning Committee meetings. Neils LeCour, coordinator of the Comprehensive Planning Committee, says that our representative should be a member of the COA. Nancy asked members to consider volunteering for that role.

NEW BUSINESS

Transportation Crisis:

Nancy gave a brief update of the new Van service. On October 9 the MV company began service to the Pioneer Valley residents, replacing the former Hulmes Company. They promised service that would maximize the use of vans and drivers and save PVTa one half million dollars. They maintained that rates to seniors would also remain the same. However, they imported out-of-state drivers who don't know the area, towns or streets. Some drivers have quit out of frustration, leaving our seniors without adequate transportation. People are missing doctor appointments, wheelchair folks are being told to find a taxi back home, people are not getting to dialysis. It is a huge, unconscionable crisis. Nancy invited guests to give their personal testimony.

Jean Laino was upset that it has been ten days since the transportation crisis began and that the COA is just now discussing becoming involved. She feels there should have been a hot line with immediate response by the COA. She feels that the seniors were left to deal with this on their own.

Dorothy Ives spoke of her experiences – being picked up too late to meet her appointment, not being picked up at all and never notified, navigating through the telephone tree then left on hold for long periods, and having to give the drivers (one from Chicago, one from Montana) directions on where to go. She has written letters and called MV about the problems.

Nancy pointed out that a recent letter stated that MV Transportation has served the Washington DC area since January 2006 and continues to have problems nine months later. Thus far we have collected names of distressed seniors, collected complaint letters, called MV and Senior Center staff have met with a member of the Board of the PVTa. Nancy asked for input from Larry Shaffer, Town Manager, on what more can be done, i.e. can pressure be brought to bear by our Public Transportation Committee or Selectboard? Larry responded by saying our first priority is to get seniors the transportation they need until PVTa can fix the problem - beginning

TODAY! We need a hotline for seniors and the town must provide drivers and vehicles to get seniors to essential services. The cost could be dealt with at a later date. Drivers must have CORI checks on file. Once the immediate problem is dealt with then we need to look at the overall problem with PVTa. He will ask Town Counsel to look into whether MV has broken their contract. A variety of ideas were discussed: 1) using the Fire Department vehicles and drivers for medical transport 2) using Meals on Wheels drivers 3) seeking volunteer drivers through HVES 4) utilizing UMass Community Service students 5) using taxis 6) establishing a hot line and notifying seniors via a press release 7) Ed offered personal assistance in whatever way necessary.

COA STAFF REPORTS

Counseling Center Update:

Sue reported a delay in starting the Counseling Center at Bangs for several reasons. Grant funding came in late, meanwhile students had made other commitments and other students are not ready yet. Consequently they are re-thinking the project. If elders came to UMass for the counseling, supervisors are already on site and the funding could be earmarked for students, not a supervisor. Counseling could then start immediately at the UMass site. One problem is that through HVES the counseling must be a 'no fee' service whereas at UMass there is a sliding scale fee in place. An emergency meeting is planned for next week.

Grace Thayer:

Nancy reminded everyone that Grace turns 100 years old on November 5. We would like to do something special to show our love. She is now at the Center for Extended Care because of a new diagnosis of stomach cancer and a compression fracture of the lower back. She can walk however and is in good spirits. Nancy will work with her family to see how we can celebrate her birthday either at Bangs or at the Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 AM to be followed by the COA Retreat.

The next COA meeting will be held on Thursday, November 16, 2006 at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary